



The Narrative Techniques in Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*

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Citation: P. Uma, et al (2023), The Narrative Techniques in Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 29(4), 3307-3312

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v29i4.7932

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The present article highlights how Meena Kandasamy's novel *The Gypsy Goddess* delves into different kinds of narratology, and it serves as a powerful fictional retelling of the Kilvenmani massacre in 1968. The narrative intricately weaves together multiple perspectives, such as the interplay of language, memory, and identity within the narrative; the study aims to reveal how Kandasamy's innovative storytelling not only documents a tragic event but also critiques the casteist and patriarchal structures that persist in contemporary society. These employ a unique blend of storytelling techniques that reflect the complexities of caste-based violence and the resilience of marginalized communities. The novelist utilizes a non-linear narrative structure, interspersing historical accounts with fictional elements, thereby challenging the reader's perception of truth and memory. Kandasamy's use of vivid imagery and rustic language evokes a visceral response, compelling readers to confront the uncomfortable realities of systemic oppression. The research analyses Kandasamy's use of different kinds of narrative structures and how metafiction challenges dominant historical narratives. It also traces the experiences of marginalized communities, mainly the working class. Her narration explores themes of anger and resistance, positioning these emotions as essential for survival and empowerment. A fierce commitment to authenticity marks Kandasamy's writing; It draws from her own experiences and the realities of her community. This novel not only serves as a poignant reminder of historical injustice, urging readers to recognize and challenge the ongoing violence faced by marginalized groups in contemporary society. Through the novel *The Gypsy Goddess*, Kandasamy reclaims the narrative of her people, transforming trauma into a powerful testament of resilience and hope.

KEYWORDS: Metafiction, Narrative techniques, Non-linear narrative, Retelling, Resistance, Storytelling

INTRODUCTION:

Meena Kandasamy is an Indian poet, writer, translator, and activist known for her bold and uncompromising voice on issues related to caste, gender, and social justice. Born on October 12, 1984, in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, she grew up in a politically engaged household that influenced her interest in activism from a young age. Kandasamy's work often focuses on the struggles of marginalized communities, particularly Dalits and women, blending personal narrative with political critique.

Her poetry collections, such as *Touch* (2006) and *Ms. Militancy* (2010), showcase her talent for combining raw emotion with intellectual rigor. She is equally well-known for her novels, *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014), a fictional account of the Kilvenmani massacre of Dalit peasants; *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2017), a searing autobiographical novel about domestic violence. The latter was shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction, bringing her international acclaim. *Exquisite Cadavers* (2019) by Meena Kandasamy is a strikingly experimental and innovative novella that explores the complexities of storytelling, authorship, and personal experience. Her work has been widely translated, and she continues to be a vital voice in contemporary literature, challenging entrenched power structures through her powerful, intersectional narratives.

Kandasamy's literary contributions are deeply rooted in her commitment to social justice, particularly concerning caste-based oppression and gender inequality. Kandasamy's debut novel, *The Gypsy Goddess*, is about the killing of Dalit farmworkers in Kilvenmani, Tamil Nadu, in 1968. 44 Dalits were killed in the massacre because they were protesting against being abused and wanted better wages. The novel is about a real killing and how impossible it is to write a book about something so natural. One trait of metafictional writing is that it is self-reflexive, meaning that the book focuses on how it was written. Because of this, *The Gypsy Goddess* can be called a metafictional book because it talks about itself. The book breaks the rules about how a novel should be put together. It has several "false starts" (Mukherjee, 2014), which means that the author tries several times to begin the book in a usual way but fails each time. The author also talks about how hard it was for her to choose the book title in several sidebars. All of these things that Kandasamy does in the story make the book self-reflective.

The Gypsy Goddess was published in 2014. The narrative intricately weaves personal stories with historical events, employing a kaleidoscope of narrative techniques that reflect the complexities of caste-based violence and the resilience of marginalized communities. In *The Gypsy Goddess*, Kandasamy utilizes a non-linear narrative structure that intersperses various perspectives, allowing readers to engage with the emotional and psychological ramifications of the massacre. The present article explores how Kandasamy used different kinds of narrative techniques in her novel *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014). Through this novel, Kandasamy challenges traditional narrative forms and reconstructs history from the viewpoint of the oppressed.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The objectives will provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the narrative techniques employed by Meena Kandasamy in her novel *The Gypsy Goddess*, allowing this novel she is a deeper understanding of the thematic richness and socio-political significance.

- This paper examines how Kandasamy's use of a non-linear narrative structure enhances the emotional depth of the story and reflects the fragmented nature of memory and trauma experienced by the characters.
- To investigate how incorporating various character perspectives contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the socio-political context surrounding the Kilvenmani massacre, allowing readers to engage with diverse voices and experiences.
- This paper analyzes Kandasamy's innovative use of language, particularly her blend of Tamil and English (referred to as "Taminglish"), and how this linguistic choice expresses cultural identity and resistance.
- To explore the symbolic elements and vivid imagery employed throughout the novel, assessing how they enhance the themes of oppression, resilience, and the struggle for justice among marginalized communities.
- To examine the portrayal of female characters in *The Gypsy Goddess*, focusing on their agency, strength, and the specific challenges they face within the patriarchal and caste-based social structure.
- To investigate how Kandasamy portrays anger as a necessary and constructive response to oppression and how this theme is woven throughout the narrative to empower the characters.
- To assess how Kandasamy situates the fictional narrative within the historical context of the 1968 Kilvenmani massacre, analyzing the interplay between historical fact and fictional retelling.
- To investigate how Kandasamy's narrative techniques evoke empathy, rage, and a sense of injustice in readers, prompting them to reflect on contemporary caste and gender-based violence issues.
- To analyze how the trauma experienced by the characters shapes their identities and relationships, exploring the psychological implications of violence and oppression within the narrative.
- To explore how Kandasamy addresses the intersectionality of caste and gender in her narrative, highlighting the compounded nature of oppression faced by Dalit women and the importance of their voices in the struggle for justice.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The scope of the study is to explore the uniqueness of the narrative techniques in Meena Kandasamy's novel *The Gypsy Goddess* encompasses an exploration of how these techniques illuminate the complex socio-political landscape surrounding the Kilvenmani massacre of 1968. Kandasamy's portrayal of female characters highlights their pivotal role in the struggle against patriarchal and caste-based injustices, emphasizing their strength and agency amidst adversity. Ultimately, the research seeks to contribute to the understanding of Meena Kandasamy's novel and the role of narrative in shaping collective memory and identity.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The review of literature on the narrative techniques in Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* provides a comprehensive understanding of the critical reception and scholarly analysis of the novel's innovative storytelling methods.

Dolores Herrero (2019), in her article, Herrero examines "The Postmodern Elements in *The Gypsy Goddess*," focuses on how Kandasamy's non-linear narrative and metafictional devices confront readers with the trauma of caste violence. She argues these techniques allow for a profound exploration of memory and survival, situating the narrative within broader discussions of caste and class struggles in contemporary India.

Moumita Biswas (2018), in her article titled "Politics of Narration in Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*". She examines the intricate narrative techniques employed by Kandasamy in her debut novel, *The Gypsy Goddess*, which centers on the Kilvenmani massacre of 1968, where Dalit agricultural laborers were brutally killed. Biswas focuses on feminist and postcolonial perspectives in her academic work. Her research often explores themes related to caste, gender, and social justice within Indian literature. In this particular article, she delves into how Kandasamy's narrative style serves as a powerful tool for critiquing the oppressive structures of casteism and misogyny prevalent in Indian society.

Lakshmi Haritha K T (2024), in her article "Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*: A Postmodern Critique," analyses how the non-linear techniques effectively portray the dire conditions of the peasant class and the oppressive structures they face, emphasizing the novel's contribution to Dalit literature. She explores how Kandasamy employs postmodern narrative strategies to convey the emotional turmoil experienced by the Dalit community. They highlight her use of non-linear storytelling and fragmented narratives that reflect the chaotic nature of historical events and personal experiences.

Ibadur Rahman (2023), in his article "The Question of Identity: An Analysis of Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*, and Urmila Pawar's *Motherwit*". It aims to elucidate the multifaceted dimensions of identity, specifically focusing on social, cultural, and gender aspects within the confines of marginalized communities in postcolonial India. *The Gypsy Goddess*, Kandasamy's poignant narrative, is centered around the 1968 Kilvenmani massacre of landless Dalit laborers, while *Motherwit*, Pawar's candid autobiographical account, examines the trials and tribulations of Dalit women's lives in Maharashtra. The article seeks to investigate the interplay between collective historical narratives and individual lived experiences by juxtaposing these two works. The article explains how Kandasamy's novel employs a kaleidoscope of narrative techniques to articulate the voice of the oppressed. At the same time, Pawar's work explores the intersectionality of caste and gender through her journey.

Aurore Montheil (2023), in her article "Memory, Empathy, and Narrative in Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*," deals with contemporary Indian literature, particularly exploring the intersections of politics, aesthetics, and gender within the works of Indian women writers. Montheil's article provides a comprehensive examination of Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*, focusing on how memory, empathy, and narrative intertwine to address complex social issues surrounding caste and violence in India. Her scholarly approach sheds light on Kandasamy's contributions to contemporary Indian literature and highlights the importance of narrative in fostering empathy and understanding for marginalized communities.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS:

In *The Gypsy Goddess*, Meena Kandasamy employs a variety of innovative narrative techniques that collectively enhance the storytelling and deepen the exploration of caste violence and oppression in India. The novel's non-linear narrative structure disrupts traditional storytelling, as seen when the narrator states, "Now, you can forget all about this and move on to the novel" (TGG), prompting readers to engage more critically with the text. Kandasamy also utilizes multiple narrative voices, allowing the perspectives of victims, relatives, and even the landlords to emerge, thereby providing a nuanced portrayal of the events surrounding the Kilvenmani massacre. For instance, the landlord, Gopalkrishna Naidu, reveals his megalomaniac tendencies, contrasting sharply with the experiences of the oppressed peasants. The incorporation of historical documents further lends authenticity to the narrative, as the author-narrator references "documents, testimonies, archival materials" (TGG) to ground the fictional retelling in reality. Additionally, the novel's metafictional elements invite readers to reflect on the act of storytelling, exemplified when the narrator remarks, "It prides itself on its ability to disappoint" (TGG), highlighting the complexities of representing trauma.

In her novel Kandasamy's use of self-reflexive narration, she directly engages the reader and critiques the act of storytelling itself. This metafictional strategy is not merely a literary device but a political statement, challenging the author's authority, the ethics of representation, and the commodification of subaltern suffering. Themes of social injustice, caste oppression, resistance, and the politics of memory are woven into her narrative techniques, making *The Gypsy Goddess* not just a work of fiction but a powerful postcolonial critique of socio-political inequities. This study argues that Kandasamy's experimental narrative methods serve as a tool of resistance, redefining how history is written and remembered while giving a voice to the silenced and oppressed in India's caste-ridden society.

The novel's rich imagery and raw language compel readers to confront the uncomfortable realities of systemic oppression while highlighting women's strength and agency in these communities. Kandasamy's portrayal of anger as a necessary response to injustice is a powerful motif throughout the narrative, emphasizing the importance of resistance and survival. Through her innovative storytelling, Kandasamy not only brings to light the historical injustices Dalit communities face but also critiques contemporary India's broader socio-political landscape. *The Gypsy Goddess* stands as a testament to the power of literature as a tool for social change, urging readers to acknowledge and challenge the ongoing violence and discrimination faced by marginalized groups. Kandasamy's work exemplifies the intersection of art and activism, making her a vital voice in contemporary Indian literature.

Kandasamy blends fact and fiction, as seen in the chapter "Once Upon a Time," where she begins with the line, "Once upon some time, in some village of some size, there lived an old woman" (TGG), merging myth with historical reality. Through these techniques, Kandasamy not only documents a tragic event but also critiques the processes of memory and representation, ultimately contributing to a richer understanding of the socio-political landscape surrounding caste issues in contemporary India.

In Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*, the narrative techniques employed serve not only to recount the tragic events of the Kilvenmani massacre but also to challenge and subvert traditional storytelling methods. The novel's non-linear narrative structure is one of its most striking features. Kandasamy deliberately disrupts the chronological flow of events, which allows her to weave together personal histories, collective memory, and historical context. For instance, the narrator reflects on the difficulty of telling this story, stating, "Most people are tired of history and also tired of history repeating itself, so I am constrained to try a new way to chart and plot my way past their boredom" (TGG). This admission highlights her awareness of the challenges in engaging readers with a narrative that confronts uncomfortable truths about caste violence and oppression.

The use of multiple narrative voices is another significant technique in the novel. Kandasamy gives voice to various characters, including the victims of the massacre, their families, and the oppressive landlords. This diversity allows for a more nuanced exploration of the socio-political dynamics at play. For example, in the chapter titled "Background," the narrator discusses the letter written by Gopala Krishna Naidu, the president of the Paddy Producer's Association, to the chief minister, seeking "immediate redressal of the grievances of paddy cultivators" (TGG). This letter gives a window into the landlords' perspective, revealing their attempts to maintain control over the labourers and suppress dissent. Kandasamy's incorporation of historical documents and testimonies further enriches the narrative. By referencing archival materials, she grounds her fictional retelling in historical reality, allowing readers to engage with the past in a tangible way. The author-narrator states, "The past is no longer an objectified entity that can be fully grasped and comprehended" (TGG), emphasizing the complexity of historical narratives and the importance of acknowledging the traces left behind by those who suffered.

Metafictional elements also play a crucial role in Kandasamy's narrative strategy. The author frequently reflects on the act of storytelling itself, questioning the ethics and responsibilities involved in representing trauma. For instance, she notes, "It prides itself on its ability to disappoint" (TGG), suggesting that narration is fraught with challenges, particularly when dealing with sensitive subjects. This self-awareness invites readers to critically engage with the text and consider the implications of how stories are told. Kandasamy's blending of fact and fiction allows her to explore broader themes of identity, memory, and resistance. In the chapter "Once Upon a Time," she begins with a fairy-tale-like opening, stating, "Once upon some time, in some village of some size, there lived an old woman" (TGG). This blending of genres highlights the absurdity of the situation while also drawing attention to the historical realities faced by the Dalit community.

The emotional impact of Kandasamy's narrative techniques is profound. The reader is led through a spectrum of emotions, such as empathy, rage, and sorrow, as they witness the characters' struggles. The narrative evokes a visceral response, compelling readers to confront the realities of caste oppression and the historical injustices that persist in contemporary society. As noted in the literature, Kandasamy's work exemplifies the ability of narrative to serve as a powerful tool for social critique, illuminating the experiences of marginalized communities and challenging dominant historical narratives. Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* employs a rich tapestry of narrative techniques that not only recount the tragic events of the Kilvenmani massacre but also engage critically with the processes of memory and representation. Through its non-linear structure, multiple perspectives, historical references, and metafictional commentary, the novel invites readers to reflect on the complexities of history and the ongoing struggles for justice and recognition faced by marginalized communities in India. Kandasamy's innovative storytelling ultimately serves as a powerful testament to the resilience of those who have been silenced and a call to acknowledge the truths that have long been obscured in the annals of history.

Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* employs a range of innovative narrative techniques that break away from traditional storytelling, allowing her to engage with the themes of caste oppression, historical trauma, and social resistance. Through a blend of non-linear narrative structures, multiple narrative voices, metafiction, and the integration of historical documents, Kandasamy reconfigures storytelling to foreground the complexities of memory and representation. The following discussion explores these techniques in detail, providing examples from the novel to illustrate their impact.

Kandasamy disrupts the linear progression of events, choosing instead to weave together disparate threads of personal, historical, and collective memory. This non-linear approach challenges conventional ways of telling history and mirrors the fragmented nature of memory, particularly for those who have experienced trauma and oppression. The non-chronological structure allows Kandasamy to focus on the events of the Kilvenmani massacre and the broader socio-political context. For example, in the novel's opening, the narrator directly addresses the reader's potential boredom with historical recounting:

"Most people are tired of history and also tired of history repeating itself, so I am constrained to try a new way to chart and plot my way past their boredom" (TGG). This meta-commentary signals Kandasamy's rejection of conventional historical narratives and emphasizes the challenge of engaging readers with uncomfortable truths about caste violence.

The non-linear form also gives Kandasamy the flexibility to shift between different times and spaces, juxtaposing the massacre's immediate aftermath with broader reflections on caste, power, and resistance. This technique allows readers to see how the events at Kilvenmani are part of a larger, ongoing struggle for social justice. A key feature of Kandasamy's narrative technique is her use of multiple voices to tell the story from different perspectives. The novel shifts between first-person, second-person, and third-person narratives, giving voice to the oppressed Dalit labourers and their oppressors, such as the landlords.

In the chapter titled "Background," Kandasamy introduces a letter from Gopala Krishna Naidu, the president of the Paddy Producer's Association, addressed to the chief minister: "We request immediate redressal of the grievances of paddy cultivators" (TGG). It is written from the perspective of the oppressor. It sheds light on the landlords' efforts to maintain control over the labourers, presenting them as aggrieved parties while masking the violent exploitation of Dalits. By presenting this perspective, Kandasamy challenges readers to confront the ideological manipulation that underpins caste violence.

Kandasamy also gives voice to the labourers and their families, allowing for a deeply human portrayal of the victims' suffering. This diversity of voices reflects the complexity of the socio-political dynamics at play, illustrating how power operates through language and representation. One of the most striking features of *The Gypsy Goddess* is Kandasamy's frequent reflections on the act of storytelling itself. The novel is deeply self-aware, with the narrator repeatedly questioning the ethics and limitations of narrating trauma. This metafictional element critiques both literature and history, drawing attention to the politics of representation. At one point, the narrator states: "It prides itself on its ability to disappoint" (TGG). Here, Kandasamy acknowledges the impossibility of fully capturing the enormity of the massacre in words. The act of narration, she suggests, is inherently limited, especially when it comes to representing the suffering of marginalized communities. This self-awareness invites readers to reflect on their role as consumers of the story and to question the nature of the truth they are being told.

Kandasamy's metafictional approach also emphasizes the power dynamics involved in storytelling. The novel asks who has the right to tell certain stories and whose voices are left out of the official historical record. This questioning of authority is central to Kandasamy's political project, as she seeks to give voice to the Dalit community, whose experiences have long been erased or distorted by mainstream historical narratives. Kandasamy enriches her fictional narrative with references to historical documents, grounding the novel in the realities of the Kilvenmani massacre. The inclusion of letters, testimonies, and archival material bridges the gap between fiction and history, reminding readers that the events depicted in the novel are based on real historical atrocities. One of the most piteous examples comes when the narrator reflects on the inadequacy of historical narratives: "The past is no longer an objectified entity that can be fully grasped and comprehended" (TGG). This line suggests that history, particularly for marginalized communities, cannot be easily captured or understood through official records alone. Instead, it is fragmented, subjective, and often contested. By incorporating historical documents, Kandasamy both validates the experiences of the oppressed and questions the authority of official histories.

Throughout *The Gypsy Goddess*, Kandasamy blends fact and fiction to create a narrative that is both emotionally powerful and intellectually challenging. This blending is evident in her use of mythical and fairy-tale elements, which she juxtaposes with stark historical realities. In the chapter titled "Once Upon a Time," Kandasamy begins with the line: "Once upon some time, in some village of some size, there lived an old woman" (TGG). This opening, reminiscent of a fairy tale, contrasts sharply with the following brutal historical events. By blending these genres, Kandasamy highlights the absurdity of the violence inflicted on the Dalit community while also drawing attention to how history can be mythologized or distorted.

Kandasamy not only recounts the Kilvenmani massacre through her experimental narrative techniques but also critiques how stories of oppression and resistance are told. Her use of a non-linear structure, multiple voices, metafictional commentary, and historical references allows her to challenge dominant historical narratives and give voice to the silenced and oppressed. Ultimately, Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* emerges as a powerful work of postcolonial literature, one that interrogates the politics of memory, representation, and storytelling. The novel's narrative techniques highlight the ongoing relevance of caste-based violence in contemporary India, inviting readers to question their relationship to history and justice. Through this innovative approach, Kandasamy calls attention to the resilience of marginalized communities and the importance of challenging the dominant narratives that continue to obscure their struggles.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* stands as a powerful exploration of caste oppression and the complexities of historical representation through its innovative narrative techniques. The novel's non-linear structure, which allows for a multifaceted understanding of the Kilvenmani massacre, challenges traditional storytelling and invites readers to engage with the past more nuancedly. Kandasamy's use of multiple narrative voices effectively amplifies the experiences of marginalized communities, allowing their stories to emerge in a way that contests dominant historical narratives. This approach aligns with Linda Hutcheon's theories on historical metafiction, emphasizing that truth is not monolithic and can be interpreted in various ways, thereby enriching the discourse surrounding caste and identity in contemporary India. Furthermore, incorporating historical documents and testimonies lends authenticity to the narrative,

grounding it in real events while highlighting the ethical complexities of representing trauma. Kandasamy's metafictional commentary on the act of storytelling invites readers to reflect on the responsibilities of narrators and the implications of their representations. The author provocatively states, "I stopped practicing politeness at tenth grade" (TGG), underscoring her commitment to confronting uncomfortable truths without adhering to conventional narrative decorum. *The Gypsy Goddess* not only serves as a poignant reminder of the atrocities faced by Dalit communities but also exemplifies the potential of literature to challenge oppressive structures and foster critical engagement with history. Kandasamy's work underscores the importance of diverse narratives in understanding the multifaceted realities of human experience, particularly in the context of caste-based injustices. Through her innovative storytelling, Kandasamy not only preserves the memory of those who suffered but also opens up spaces for dialogue and reflection, urging readers to confront the ongoing struggles for justice and recognition within society.

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